

The Endangered Species Act

What is the Endangered Species Act?

The Endangered Species Act is a federal law and is the safety net for wildlife, plants and fish that are on the brink of extinction. Upon signing the Endangered Species Act (ESA) on December 28, 1973, President Nixon stated "Nothing is more priceless and more worthy of preservation than the rich array of animal life with which our country has been blessed." This statement defines the ESA's ultimate purpose, which is to conserve the nation's natural heritage for the enjoyment and benefit of current and future generations.

Why do we need the Act?

We need the Endangered Species Act in order to ensure our children and grandchildren can experience the environment as we have known it, and leave behind a legacy of protecting endangered species and the places they call home. The Endangered Species Act prevents the extinction of fish, plants and wildlife, an important responsibility to uphold because once they are gone they are gone forever.

How does the Act work?

One of the most effective ways to protect species is to protect the places where they live. Species need their habitat as much as you need your house in order to survive. The Endangered Species Act protects the critical habitat that is needed to prevent the extinction of endangered fish, plants and wildlife. We live in this habitat as well and by preserving and keeping it clean we create a healthy environment for ourselves.

The Endangered Species Act provides common sense solutions for government agencies, landowners, and concerned citizens to protect and restore endangered species and their habitat. It is based on three key elements:

- **Listing** species as threatened or endangered
- **Designating habitat** essential for their survival and recovery
- **Restoring healthy populations** of the species

The bald eagle, the peregrine falcon, and the gray wolf have all benefited from the act; once on the edge of extinction, they have rebounded to the point where populations are more stable. The Act does more than just protect threatened species; it protects a habitat supporting the greater web of life.

Listing: A declining species has to be added to the official list of endangered and threatened species before it receives any federal protection. Government scientists may propose a species is listed because of the threats to its survival such as habitat loss, pollution, invasive species and overharvesting. Any person may petition the government to list a species as either endangered or threatened. The decision to list a species is supposed to be based solely on the best available science.

The Fish and Wildlife Service maintains a current list of endangered and threatened species at endangered.fws.gov

Critical Habitat: The ESA requires the designation of critical habitat for all endangered and threatened species. Critical habitat is an area "essential to the conservation of the species", including areas that are not currently occupied by the species. Simply put, critical habitat is habitat necessary for the recovery of an endangered or threatened species. Since habitat loss is the most prevalent cause of endangerment -- affecting more than 95% of all listed species according to one study -- critical habitat must be protected if endangered and threatened species are to be conserved.

Recovery Planning: Recovery plans, as part of the Fish and Wildlife Service's Recovery Program, are designed to reverse the decline of a threatened or endangered species and eventually bring the population to a self-sustaining level. Each plan should include:

- a description of the species' current situation, including any relevant scientific data;
- a recovery objective (for example, a target population number), and a list of criteria for indicating when the objective has been achieved;
- an implementation schedule, including priorities of tasks and cost estimates;
- an appendix identifying appropriate external reviews of the plan, and any additional pertinent information.

A recovery plan may include a myriad of different options including reintroduction, habitat acquisition, captive propagation, habitat restoration and protection, population assessments, research and technical assistance for landowners, and public education. Unfortunately, implementation of a recovery plan is not mandatory, so it is up to concerned citizens to make sure the actions are taken to save endangered species

Prepared by the Endangered Species Coalition www.stopextinction.org
Endangered Species Day website www.stopextinction.org/EndangeredSpeciesDay
For more information, contact Sarah Matsumoto at smatsumoto@stopextinction.org